



NEWS RELEASE

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OCTOBER 4, 2004
FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

OPERATION ICE PALACE
OZARK MAN PLEADS GUILTY TO ROLE IN METH CONSPIRACY

SPRINGFIELD, Mo. – Todd P. Graves, United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, announced that an Ozark, Mo., man pleaded guilty in federal court today to his role in a conspiracy to manufacture and distribute methamphetamine.

Operation Ice Palace is a long-term investigation into the illegal sale of large quantities of over-the-counter cold medications to methamphetamine manufacturers in southwest Missouri. Operation Ice Palace resulted in a series of indictments by a federal grand jury against 53 defendants.

Charles Brian Freeman, 37, of Ozark, pleaded guilty before U.S. District Judge Richard E. Dorr this afternoon to conspiracy to manufacture and distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine between November 1999 and March 18, 2002, in Greene, Taney and Webster counties of Missouri.

Specifically, **Freeman** admitted that he assisted in the purchase of a pickup truck with drug money and that he sold methamphetamine. Altogether, the conspiracy resulted in the manufacture and distribution of between 50 and 200 grams of methamphetamine, Graves said.

Freeman was originally charged in an indictment that was returned by a federal grand jury on Oct. 16, 2003, in Springfield.

Two other co-defendants also have pleaded guilty to their role in the methamphetamine conspiracy.

On July 8, 2004, **Tamela Caswell-Mertz**, 36, of Nixa, Mo., pleaded guilty to maintaining a drug-involved premises in Christian County, Mo., on or about Oct. 17, 2001. The premises, which was **Caswell-Mertz's** home, was the location of a methamphetamine laboratory operated

by co-conspirators in this case.

On July 20, 2004, **Lisa Bick**, 25, of Hollister, pleaded guilty to conspiracy to manufacture and distribute 50 grams or more of methamphetamine in Greene, Christian, Taney and Webster counties, between November 1999 and March 18, 2002. By pleading guilty, **Bick** admitted that she assisted in the conspiracy by helping to locate buyers for the methamphetamine, Graves said, and was given some of the methamphetamine in exchange.

Under federal statutes, each of the co-defendants each could be subject to a mandatory minimum sentence of five years in federal prison without parole, up to 40 years, plus a fine up to \$2 million. Sentencing hearings will be scheduled after the completion of a presentence investigation by the United States Probation Office.

This case is being prosecuted by Assistant U.S. Attorney Randall D. Eggert. It was investigated by the U.S. Drug Enforcement Administration, the Bureau of Alcohol, Tobacco, Firearms and Explosives, COMET (the Combined Ozarks Multi-jurisdictional Enforcement Team), the Missouri State Highway Patrol, the Greene County Sheriff's Department, and the Springfield, Mo., Police Department.

This news release, as well as additional information about the office of the United States Attorney for the Western District of Missouri, is available on-line at

www.usdoj.gov/usao/mow